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RCM LONDON

THE PURPOSE AND OBJECTS OF THE SOCIETY OF WOMEN MUSICIANS

By KATHARINE EGGAR

President – – MISS KATHLEEN LONG
Vice-President and Chairman : MISS ROSE MORSE
Organising Secretary : MISS RACHEL FELL,
74 GROSVENOR STREET, W.1.

Founded 15th July, 1911, by Gertrude Eaton and Marion Scott.

President
1911-12 : LIZA LEHMANN
1912-13 : EMILY R. DAYMOND, MUS.D.
1913-14 : CÉCILE C. CHAMINADE
1914-15 : KATHARINE EGGAR
1915-16 : MARION SCOTT
1916-17 : GERTRUDE EATON
1917-18 : MARIE BREMA
1918-19 : THE LADY MARY TREFUSIS
1919-21 : KATHLEEN SCHLESINGER
1921-23 : ADINE O'NEILL
1923-24 : AGNES LARKCOM

President
1924-26 : FANNY DAVIES
1926-27 : EVANGELINE FLORENCE
1927-30 : ROSA NEWMARCH
1930-32 : EVELYN SUART
1932-34 : ELSIE HORNE
1934-35 : EDITH CLEGG
1935-36 : ALMA GOATLEY
1936-38 : HESTER STANSFELD PRIOR
1938-43 : MYRA HESS, D.B.E.
1943-46 : KATHLEEN LONG

MARION SCOTT, with whom the idea of such a Society originated, was above all things anxious to encourage serious study in composition by women, and she felt the need of a centre where women musicians could meet and discuss musical matters freely. Gertrude Eaton, her friend, a leading spirit in various social services of the time, felt the lack of co-operation among contemporary musical women, and wished to bring a more generous view into their outlook on Music as a career. The Society was accordingly founded with these aims, and its activities may conveniently be summarised under the headings indicated below.

1. Composition

The Annual Composers' Two-Day Conferences, started by Miss Scott in 1912 and devoted to the hearing and discussion of Papers by Members, Associates (Men), and Guests, have done much to stimulate the serious study of composition and to provoke expression and that free exchange of views and experience for which women had previously lacked opportunity.

Competitions and prizes for various forms of composition have been organised and offered from time to time, and there

is now a Composers' Committee which every summer considers the works sent in by members and thereon makes recommendations for performance, and gives criticisms.

The standard of members' output has risen and the scope increased to a notable extent ; and on the occasion of the Society's "Silver Jubilee" in 1936, a Festival of Works by Members Past and Present was held. The following alphabetical list of the composers represented on this occasion will give some idea of the support which the S.W.M. has gained : Kathleen Bruckshaw, Cécile Chaminade, Marie Dare, Lesley Davidson, Katharine Eggar, Kalitha Dorothy Fox, Monica Gillies-Myatt, Alma Goatley, Hilda Grieveson, Ann Hamerton, Lois Henderson, Imogen Holst, Elsie Horne, Lucie Johnstone ("Lewis Carey"), Jane Joseph, Liza Lehmann, Fiona McCleary, Elizabeth Maconchy, Kathleen Richards, Teresa del Riego, Lilian Robinson, Eleanor Rudall, Mabel Saumarez Smith, Ethel Smyth, D.B.E., Phyllis Tate, Dora White, Maude Valerie White.

2. A Centre

Although never rich enough to acquire premises of its own or to rent adequate housing for its multiple activities—for, to quote the first Annual Report, "in drawing up a working scheme, the founders were faced with the problem of how to provide premises suitable for music meetings and other gatherings and yet not make the subscription prohibitive to young professionals to whom the Society might be of the greatest use" —the S.W.M. has always managed to provide a place for its members to meet where its two libraries are kept and its business is carried on. Since 1920 its Headquarters have been at 74, Grosvenor Street, W.1, and every year twelve to fifteen regular meetings—Concerts or Lectures—have been held, with frequent additional programmes of some special character. These last-mentioned have included successful social functions —Receptions, Dinners, Luncheons—Public Concerts, Concerts for Charities, Concerts by invitation in the drawing-rooms of kind hostesses, and an occasional outburst of sheer frivolity.

The making of Chamber Music has always been a feature of the Society's life, and in this connection it owes an immense debt to the late W. W. Cobbett, a firm and generous friend from the outset, who not only gave substantial sums for the furtherance of the aims in general but instituted Annual Competitions for Medals in String Quartet playing and also presented to the S.W.M. his Free Lending Library of British Chamber Music,

which is open to the public, not only to members of the S.W.M.

From time to time the Singers of the Society have formed Choral Groups ; and classes in conducting, under Guy Warrack, were organised at a time when such instruction was practically unobtainable ; we have Dorothy Earhart and others as testimony to their value.

3. Co-operation

The Council of the S.W.M. has always tried to act as guardian in the interests of women musicians, to give advice in difficulties, to protest against exploitation, etc. Its action on repeated occasions has been helpful to women's claims, e.g. in lawsuits, questions of employment, representation on Boards and Committees, inclusion in orchestras, and so forth. This representative character was greatly strengthened when the S.W.M. was incorporated under the Board of Trade in 1930. It now stands as the representative body where the interests of women in music are concerned.

4. Generosity of Outlook

A chronicle of the imponderables which come under this heading is not easy to compile, but it is only fair to those who have been the leading spirits in its career to say how true has been the culture and how varied the interests with which the Society has been animated. All who have held office have given the most generous service, and have worked together to build up high standards not only in their beloved art but also in that spirit of friendliness and faithfulness which strikes visitors to the meetings as characteristic. Indeed, an Association which—to mention but four names—has had among its Presidents such a teacher as Agnes Larkcom, such a critic as Rosa Newmarch, such a scholar as Kathleen Schlesinger, such an artist as Fanny Davies, has much to make it proud and thankful. And perhaps in this connection it may be mentioned that the S.W.M. from the first admitted and welcomed men as Associates.

To conclude this survey, special reference has to be made to the work carried on during the harassing years of world warfare. Quotations from the Annual Reports of 1940-1945 will tell the tale :

> "In spite of the difficult conditions under which the Society has worked since the opening of hostilities, it has been among the comparatively few musical enterprises that have not only carried on the usual programmes but have increased activities." (1940).

Subsequent events showed that the energy and optimism of this excellent start bore fruit. Few other musical societies, we venture to guess, can have reported twenty-four new members in 1942, sixty-eight in 1943, fifty-nine in 1944, and again fifty-nine in 1945.

It was in 1940 that the foundation of a Fund for Artists' Fees, through the generosity of an unfailing friend, Mrs. Eileen Bernard, made it possible to start a series of subscription concerts to give engagements to members whose work had been endangered by war conditions. This led to the organisation of concerts for the men of H.M. Forces at Croydon, Wimbledon and Kingston, and to the engagement of members for concerts in the Eastern Command. "From September 1941 to July 1942, seventy-five concerts were arranged at Croydon, Westcliff, and other centres, at which 150 of our members took part"; while in 1943 "the total number of concerts to Troops given during the last twelve months was 106, and this meant 246 engagements for members."

All through this period, the Society's own fixtures have kept up a high standard of performance and interest, "particular care being taken by the Council in arranging programmes to avoid what is hackneyed and to strike a balance between the old and the new music."

Naturally, at the same time, a very large number of the S.W.M.'s members have been doing valuable war-work, much of which is voluntary. Among their activities are the Services, Ambulance Driving, Motor Transport Service, Women's Voluntary Services, Canteen work, A.R.P. and fire-watching, music supply for Prisoner of War camps, book repairs for the Merchant Navy, work in Censorship and other Government offices.